

Can you name this plant? See last page for the answer.



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Working with landowners towards conservation of Louisiana's native habitats

<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/natural-areas-registry-program/>

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Louisiana Conservationist available online free at link <http://louisianaconservationist.org/>

NATURAL AREAS UPDATE

We are recognizing three new Natural Areas this quarter: Bluebonnet Swamp, Frenchtown Road Conservation Area, and Thomas Reed's Bluff. These additions bring our registered Natural Areas to 117, capturing 37,495 acres in 36 of 64 parishes.

BLUEBONNET SWAMP is a 103 acre site located within



Baton Rouge and owned by East Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission (BREC). It supports cypress-tupelo swamp and bottomland hardwood forest communities. Bluebonnet Swamp has a diverse flora and serves as important habitat for resident wildlife as well as neotropical migrants in an otherwise urban environment. Louisiana Blue Star (*Amsonia ludoviciana*), shown at top right, is a state and globally rare plant species that has been recorded here by BREC along with an extensive plant species list totaling 162 native species. Additionally, 119 bird species have been recorded during the past year at Bluebonnet Swamp. Bluebonnet Swamp Nature

Center is located within the natural area and presents live animal exhibits, photographic presentations of the site's flora and fauna, natural artifact and mineral displays, and a vintage waterfowl decoy carving collection. Ecology and art exhibits are also featured periodically. Over a mile of gravel paths and boardwalks provide access to the varied habitats. While snakes and turtles are commonly seen from the trails, raccoons, rabbits, opossums, armadillos, squirrels, foxes, coyotes, deer and otter are also known to inhabit the site.



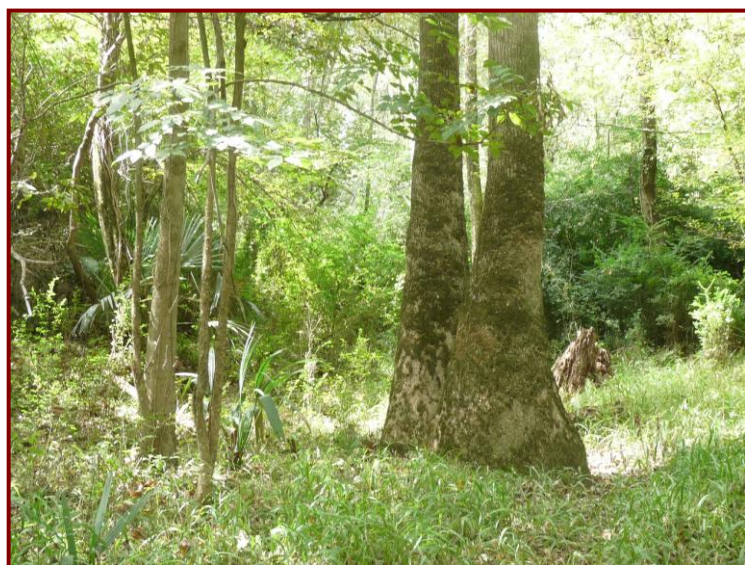
Louisiana Blue Star

FRENCHTOWN ROAD CONSERVATION AREA is a 457 acre site owned by BREC in East Baton Rouge Parish that has been set aside for conservation purposes. It supports a small stream forest with ridge and swale topography. Frenchtown Road Conservation Area occurs along the Amite and Comite Rivers. Relatively large, mature spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*), and American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) are present. The diversity of this forest is important to native and migrating neotropical birds as well as residential wildlife. Swainson's



Swainson's Warbler

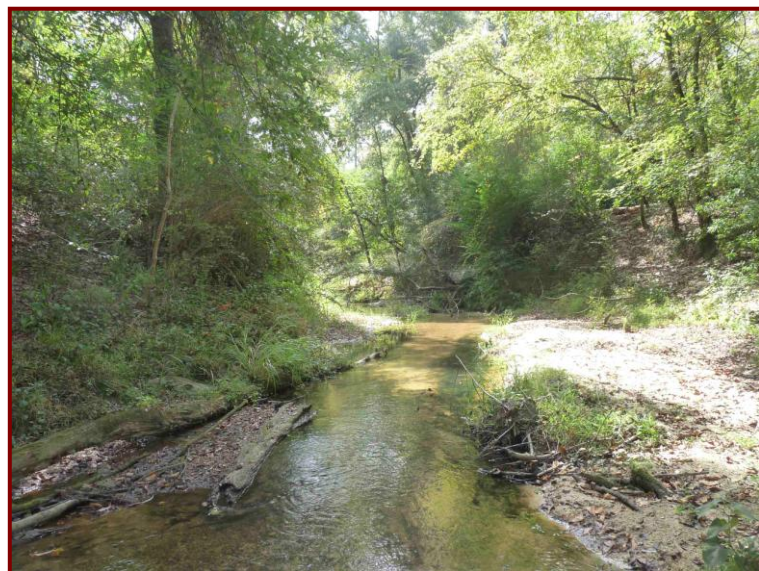
Danny Balos



Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*), shown on front page at bottom right, is a species of conservation concern that has been documented at this site along with 54 additional bird species. One of the most secretive and least observed of all North American birds. The Swainson's Warbler is a bird that resides in and moves very quietly through southern canebrakes and rhododendron thickets. If it weren't for its loud, ringing song (*Whee; whee; se-wich-i-teeoo*), the presence of this species in many areas would go undetected. See The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds at <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/SwainsonsWarbler/lifehistory> and BirdJam - Know the Birds You Hear at <http://www.birdjam.com/birdsong.php?id=97>.

THOMAS REED'S BLUFF

consists of two parcels totaling 87.56 acres in Tangipahoa Parish owned by Thomas Reed. It supports high quality examples of hardwood slope forest, small stream forest (shown in the photo below at



Sweetwater Creek) and cypress swamp habitats. Thomas Reed's Bluff is visited by many locals and enthusiasts in the spring when large numbers of wild azaleas (*Rhododendron*



canescens), shown in the photo at bottom left are in bloom. Relatively large southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandifolia*), sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), swamp titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*), and sourwood (*Oxyden-drum arboreum*) are present. Silky camellia (*Stewartia malacodendron*), shown above is a state-rare shrub that also occurs on the natural area.

It's Spring Migration

By Harriett Pooler

For bird watchers, April is the hottest month of the year.

Migration is a remarkable and mysterious phenomenon in which birds travel incredible distances. Books have been written on the subject, a topic too deep for a single column. However, migration is like clockwork and you can count on it occurring every fall and every spring. In the spring, birds that winter in the Caribbean, Central and South America (the Neotropics) make the long journey back to the United States and Canada to set up breeding territories and find a mate. Once these northern birds have raised their families and become empty nesters, they head south in the fall to avoid the cold winter weather.

Exactly what prompts birds to migrate and become frequent fliers is not fully understood. Scientists believe the position of the sun at various times of the day, the position of the constellations at night (many smaller birds migrate at night), various landscape features and magnetic fields are all components that come into harmony prompting birds to migrate. Whatever the forces are, the birds respond at the same time every year, sometimes down to the same day. The Northern Parula, a tiny bird with a bright yellow throat and a loud trill, weighs less than an ounce and will travel several hundred miles during migration. It is an amazing feat, which puts human exercise workouts into proper perspective.

While living in South America during the winter and flying north to the States for spring may sound like lifestyles of the rich and famous, it is neither easy nor luxurious. Many songbirds never complete their journey and perish crossing the vast Gulf of Mexico. When migrants do land many are so exhausted they plop anywhere including on the ground and in low branches making them vulnerable to predation. Vanishing ecosystems called coastal forests offer a respite for these weary birds in addition to a place for birdwatchers to see them. Some

migrants will stay in Louisiana but others will continue their journey further northward.

Sometimes the birds descend from the sky in such abundance and with so many different species that you can see them without binoculars literally dripping from tree branches. This is what birders call a “fall-out.” A fall-out occurs when cold, dry air masses coming from the north come in contact with warm, moist air from the south, and northerly winds are the result. Often violent squalls of torrential rain and wind are produced from this type of weather pattern. While fall-outs are a special once-in-a-lifetime treat for birdwatchers, it isn’t always good for the birds. Forced from the sky by rough weather, many migrants are killed. For birders though, once

the starving birds in addition to a place for migrants to rest. Bird species you might see include the Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Orchard Orioles, American Redstart, Blue and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Cedar Waxings. The grosbeaks and tanagers especially love the ripe berries from the mulberry trees that are in full bloom then. Warbler species to look for include Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Blue-winged, Cerulean, Chestnut-sided, Golden-winged, Hooded, Kentucky, Prothonotary, Tennessee and Worm-eating. And you never know what unusual bird might deviate from its beaten flyway path and show up on Louisiana’s coast. Last year a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher was spotted during migration. These birds

are usually found in Central America and northern South America.

If you are a novice birder and want to see what migration is all about, check out these two April events: the Grand Isle Migratory Bird Festival and the Louisiana Ornithological Society’s spring meeting. **The Grand Isle Migratory Bird Festival** takes place this year on April 15–17 in Grand Isle, Louisiana’s only inhabited barrier island. Several birding tours are conducted at The Nature Conservancy’s Sureway Woods and Grilletta Tract, both coastal maritime forests. More information can be found at grandisle.btne.org.

The LOS has its annual spring meeting in Cameron during the last weekend in April, during which the society’s president leads a birding tour for anyone interested. Birding occurs all around Cameron but mainly in Peveto Woods, a 42-acre tract owned by the Baton Rouge Audubon Society. Registration information can be found on LOS’s website at LOS.org.

Do not be intimidated to attend either of these events if you are a novice bird watcher. Folks at every birding level participate to enjoy the outdoors and learn more. Every expert birder was once a beginner and is happy to share their knowledge with new birders. You really haven’t bird watched until you bird on the coast during spring migration.

Happy Birding!



Photo taken by Dave Patton in Cameron Parish at Peveto Woods that include Indigo Bunting, Red-eyed Vireo, Painted Buntings, and Baltimore Oriole.

you have witnessed the overwhelming beauty of a fall-out you never forget it, and regular bird watching is just never quite the same anymore.

Birds migrate together according to species. You might walk into the woods and see flocks of Black-throated Green Warblers in one area and then a flock of Wood Thrushes in another area. Sometimes the birds migrate according to sexes also, with the males travelling separately from the females. There really is something to the saying “birds of a feather flock together,” although you can also see mixed flocks with a dozen or more species moving through the trees together.

The best place to experience spring migration is along the Louisiana coast in Cameron and Grand Isle. Both spots offer birding on coastal cheniers, which are high ridges of hackberry and live oaks—great insect magnets that offer quick food for

Harriett Pooler has been an avid bird watcher for the past seventeen years, is a member of the LA Ornithological Society, and is the immediate past president for the Baton Rouge Audubon Society, as well as Donor Relations Manager for The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana.

Article appeared in the "Country Roads" magazine, April 2011 edition.

MYSTERY PLANT

The plant on the front page is **Strawberry Bush** (*Euonymus americanus*) photographed in October 2010 on Thomas Reed's Bluff Natural Area. Strawberry Bush is a shrub two to six feet high that grows in moist deciduous woods throughout much of the Eastern United States. The flowers are yellowish green or greenish purple, born at the end of long stalks and



appear from March to June. The fruits are rounded capsules with a warty surface. The capsules split open at maturity to expose bright red seeds and take on the appearance of a strawberry, ripening in September or October. It is an excellent ornamental species because the leaves turn dark red in autumn; they have dark red capsules and scarlet red seeds. The open capsules account for several common names (burning bush, bursting heart, hearts-a-burstin-love). Strawberry bush is best used in natural settings, in the shade of larger shrubs and trees. Large specimens can have hundreds of "bursting" red capsules. In the winter, the bright green twigs are also attractive.

REFERENCES:

USDA Plant Guide for Strawberry Bush at
http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_euam7.pdf

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PREVIOUS NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2011, VOL. 8, NO. 2 OF 4. We gave an update on the total number of registered areas and introduced one new Natural Area. Randy Wiggins was introduced as our new field biologist. An update of Natural Heritage Program projects was presented. A progress report was presented on Map Turtle Surveys in the Pearl and Bogue Chitto Rivers. The mystery photo was purpleheaded sneezeweed (*Helenium flexuosum*).